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SUBJECT: Five Rwandan UNAMID Peacekeepers Killed in Two Separate Attacks in North Darfur

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Five Rwandan peacekeepers with the United Nations-African Union Mission in Darfur (UNAMID) were killed over the weekend in two separate attacks in North Darfur. Gunmen opened fire on a UNAMID convoy traveling near Saraf Omra on December 4, killing three peacekeepers. On December 5, gunmen fired on three peacekeepers assisting with water distribution near the UNAMID team site in Shagil Tobaya, killing two. GOS authorities announced arrests in the Saraf Omra killings, but did not release any additional details. UNAMID noted that in both cases, peacekeepers returned fire but acted to minimize civilian casualties. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) On Friday, December 4, unidentified gunmen opened fire on Rwandan peacekeepers escorting a water tanker in Saraf Omra, North Darfur, approximately 240 km northwest of El Fasher. Two peacekeepers were killed immediately, three were seriously wounded, and one of the wounded died prior to being evacuated to El Fasher. The ambush took place 300 meters from a Government of Sudan (GOS) police checkpoint, in the presence of numerous civilians. The perpetrators escaped immediately following the attacks. UN sources reported that some gunmen were dressed as civilians, and others wore olive drab fatigues of a type common throughout Darfur but denoting no specific identification. On December 6, GOS-controlled press reported that the Governor of North Darfur, Wali Osman Kibir, announced the arrest of the attackers, but neither UNAMID nor independent sources were able to immediately confirm this information, and the GOS did not offer any additional details.

¶3. (SBU) On Saturday, December 5, unidentified armed gunmen staged another attack on Rwandan peacekeepers in North Darfur. Two peacekeepers were killed at 4:40 p.m. in an attack close to the UNAMID team site in Shagil Tobaya, a town approximately 50 km south of El Fasher. According to UN sources, three peacekeepers were on water distribution detail, and were assisting a crowd of civilians at a water collection point located 500 meters from the entrance to the team site. (Note: Shagil Tobaya has seen tribal clashes in the last month, and a growing number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) have sought security by squatting on the land surrounding the team site. End note.) Armed gunmen standing within the crowd of civilians raised their weapons and fired, killing two peacekeepers immediately and seriously wounding a third. The attackers stole a UNAMID vehicle, but quickly abandoned it after being pursued by a response team from the UNAMID team site. The attackers escaped, and GOS authorities had not announced any arrests as of the afternoon of December 6.

¶4. (SBU) Acting UNAMID Chief of Staff Kemal Saiki noted that in both cases, peacekeepers returned fire, but acted with restraint due to the civilians present in both locations. In both cases, the Rwandan peacekeeping companies involved operate in areas where Arab militias have repeatedly clashed with local tribes, in territory over which

the GOS has very limited control. In addition to the twenty-two peacekeepers killed since the start of UNAMID's operations in 2008, two UNAMID civilian staff remain held after being kidnapped in West Darfur in September.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The presence of UNAMID peacekeepers remains a politically explosive issue in many localities throughout Darfur. By upsetting the delicate balance between GOS security forces, local militia and civilians, peacekeepers become another unconcealed target in a region with no shortage of armed actors and political grievances. It is unlikely that any information will emerge to connect the two attacks, but the number of coincidences, as one UN official put it, is "unusual." Detractors may be eager to point the finger at Khartoum, but at this time, the most that can be noted is that the GOS has done little to hold to account those who have killed or kidnapped UNAMID peacekeepers and civilian staff. For a government with judges, prosecutors and security forces in all three states of Darfur, the GOS has not taken sufficient measures to discourage the environment of impunity that exists. End comment.

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